3: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

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# MARINE INDUSTRIES OF EASTERN ARABIA

RICHARD LeBARON BOWEN, JR.

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THE Persian Gulf coast of Saudi Arabia is desolate in the extreme: in many places one travels along the beach for dozens of miles without seeing a living soul. But there is a sprinkling of old coastal towns, whose inhabitants for the most part gain their livelihood from the sea. Among them are Jubail, long a port of entry for the capital city of Riyadh, 235 miles inland; Dammam, seaport for the Qatif and Safwa oases (a deep-water pier has recently been constructed at Dammam); Al Khobar and Oqair, ports for the great oasis of Hofuf (Hasa). To these have been added of late years Arabian American Oil Company settlements at Ras al Mish'ab (a construction camp and port facilities), Nejma (a refinery and camp), and Ras Tanura (pipeline terminus and cargo wharf).

## FISHING

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Foremost among the marine activities of the older coastal towns is fishing. Although there are far fewer species of fish in the Persian Gulf than in the Indian Ocean, they are present in greater numbers, particularly the porgies, than one might expect in so warm a body of salt water, and fish form a welcome addition to the diet in a land where food is pitifully scarce.

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Fishing methods range from a simple hand line to large and complicated fishweirs. On land the hand line is used mainly by small boys, who, like the small fry of any other country, enjoy fishing. Since there is an almost complete lack of jetties and piers, these young fishermen have to stand on the beach and heave their weighted lines as far as they can (Fig. 2). When the fish are running, these youngsters line the shores, and their catch is sometimes sizable. Hand lines are indispensable on every dhow and are thrown out as soon as the boat is in open water.

A more advanced type of fishing uses the throw net—a circular net about 16 feet in diameter made of quarter-inch-mesh netting. The periphery is weighted with small lead weights, then doubled back toward the center and tied at 12-inch intervals to form a continuous pocket some six inches deep. The fisherman walks in knee-deep water at low tide, holding his net —which he has folded and gathered with the perfection of a parachutist—

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3: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2



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Fig. 1—Location map. Inset shows places mentioned in the text.

with both hands and his teeth. When spots a school of fish, he flings the 226
net into the air with one arm (much like a man sowing seed) and a snap of his head. The net opens out flat and drops on the water; the weights carry the outside to the bottom faster than the center. The fisherman then picks up the net by the center, and any fish under it immediately swim toward the edge and are trapped in the pocket. He keeps pulling the center through one hand and folding it up, and when he has finally gathered in the whole net, he carefully removes the fish flopping around in the pocket, puts them in a palm-leaf basket, and starts all over again.

The Arabs also use wire and palm-leaf basket fishtraps (Fig. 4). These 224
are oval-shaped, from two to five feet long, with a cone-shaped entrance 262
on each end through which the fish cannot squeeze out. The traps are usually baited with cuttlefish, forbidden to the Arabs by a strict interpretation of

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2



however, if it sighted land, it headed straight for it, showing the sailors the direction of the nearest land. Certainly this would seem to indicate voyages of more daring than mere coasting voyages. There are numerous Sanskrit and Pali references to Indian trading voyages dating from about the third century B.C., and there is one Sanskrit manuscript containing a treatise on shipbuilding in ancient India, giving the sizes (ranging up to 260 feet in length) of dozens of types of ships.[2]

Zanzibar is the unofficial southern port for the lateen fleet sailing down from the north, although the Indians sometimes go on to Madagascar. Soon after the northeast monsoon has set in, lateen craft start to come into Zanzibar. Arabs come from the Persian Gulf ports of Basra, Kuwait, Bahrein, and Sharjah on the Trucial Coast of Oman; Persians send ships from the Persian Gulf ports of Bushire, Lingeh, Qishm, and Bandar Abbas. Arabs of the Oman ports of Sur and Muscat on the Gulf of Oman and Indians from the Gulf of Cutch and the Malabar coast all send dhows down to Africa. Arab craft also sail down from Aden and Mukalla in the Hadhramaut, while the Red Sea contributes its craft from Port Sudan, Massawa, and Hodeida. Even the Somali coast contributes to the fleet arriving at Zanzibar, with dhows coming down from Djibouti, Berbera, and Mogadiscio.

Kuwait is the largest maritime and dhow-building port in the Persian Gulf, with Bahrein a very poor second. While Bahrein cannot begin to compare with Kuwait from a maritime standpoint, it probably ranks ahead of the latter as an emporium in the Persian Gulf. It serves for all the entrepôt trade to the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, the goods coming into Bahrein in large dhows and being transshipped from Bahrein to Arabia in shallow-draft *jalbhuts* (see Plate 17—top). In 1939 Kuwait had 106 ocean-going *bhums* on the registry.[4] However, the majority of the Kuwait deepwater *bhums* sail to India, rather than to Africa, carrying dates from Basra. The mariners of Kuwait probably reached their present maritime status a little over a century ago. Palgrave traveled in the Persian Gulf in 1862-1863 and was much impressed with the maritime activity of Kuwait:

> Among all the seamen who ply the Persian Gulf, the mariners of [Kuwait] hold the first rank in daring, in skill, and in solid trustworthiness of character. Fifty years since their harbour with its little town . . . was a mere nothing: now it is the most active and the most important port of the northerly Gulf.[5]

[2] R. Mookerji, *Indian Shipping* (Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), p. 19.

[4] A. Villiers, 'The Arab Dhow Trade,' *Middle East Journal*, II (1948), 399.

[5] W. G. Palgrave, *A Year's Journey Through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862-63)* (3rd ed., London: Macmillan and Co., 1866), II, 386.

4: Bowen C-8 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2



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However, a century before this, Kuwait was apparently noted more for its pearl fisheries (which are still important) than for its maritime trade, as Niebuhr related that in 1763

> Kuwait is a sea-port town. . . . The inhabitants live by the fishery of pearls and of fishes. They are said to employ in this species of naval industry more than 800 boats. In the favorable season of the year, this town is left almost desolate, everybody going out either to the fishing, or upon some trading adventure.[6]

In Niebuhr's time, in the eighteenth century, the Omani sailors from Muscat and Sur on the Gulf of Oman were the famed Arab mariners, for Niebuhr related that

> The inhabitants of Oman, although not fond of sea-fights, are nevertheless the best mariners in all Arabia. They have several good harbours, and employ many small vessels in the navigation between Jidda and Basra. To this last town there come annually fifty such vessels.[7]

In the middle of the last century Muscat was still an important maritime port, for in 1854 Osgood related that

> Several ports in the Persian Gulf are tributary to it, and some excellent ships and a large number of [*baghlas*] employed in coasting and foreign trade, are owned by the Banian merchants at Muscat. In fact more than half of the trade of the Persian Gulf is carried on in ships owned at Muscat. . . . The trade with America, which is carried on chiefly by vessels from Salem does not exceed thirty-five or forty thousand dollars annually. Dates and cash are usually taken in exchange for American merchandize.[8]

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In the present day Muscat has completely fallen from its former prized position and given way to Kuwait and Bahrein Island in the Persian Gulf. However, the port of Sur in Oman still carries on the maritime tradition of the Omanis and maintains a considerable fleet of dhows which have long been prominent in the trading along the African coast.

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The craft that make the trip down the African coast from Arabia are by no means all large ocean-going vessels; craft of all sizes and descriptions come into Zanzibar. Villiers[9] tells of seeing a 30-foot *jalbhut* from Oman sailing down the African coast. Having owned and sailed a *jalbhut* of about the same size in the relatively calm Persian Gulf waters, I have nothing but the utmost respect for anyone with the nerve to sail such a small open boat several thousand miles in the potentially rougher Indian Ocean.

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[6] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), II, 127.
[7] Ibid., 122.
[8] Osgood, *Notes of Travel* (Salem, 1854), p. 81.
[9] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 190.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2



waters from May to September, and why most local Indian craft are drawn up on the beaches.

## II

Dates are probably as important a factor as the monsoons in maintaining the large lateen fleet in the waters of the Indian Ocean. By a lucky coincidence, the great date crop of Iraq begins to ripen just before the northeast monsoon sets in about October. The great maritime expansion of the port of Kuwait has probably been due in no small part to its proximity to Basra, the port through which most of Iraq's dates go.

Dhows come to Basra for dates from Kuwait, Bahrein, Persia, Oman, India, and even as far away as the Hadhramaut. Starting in the latter part of August and continuing into September, Kuwait deepwater ships are floated from the beaches, where they have rested for several months during the summer, making ready for the run to Basra to pick up dates. The farther the home port is from Basra, the earlier the ships must depart, so that craft from the Hadhramaut must allow a month or more to get to Basra, riding up to the Gulf of Oman on the summer monsoon and then working their way up the Persian Gulf, where the monsoon is not felt.

Almost without exception the date cargo is carried out of Basra on consignment for some merchant; sometimes the destination is known on leaving Basra, but often the consignment is sent to Aden or Mukalla (see Plate 23—bottom) in South Arabia for final shipping instructions from the Arab or Indian export firm shipping the dates. Dates are usually not carried into the Red Sea much past Hodeida in the Yemen in Kuwait ships, although Villiers[14] tells of a Kuwait *bhum* transporting a load of dates as far as Qizan in Saudi Arabia.

In such a manner dates have been leaving Iraq for decades bound for the southern shores—that is until the winter of 1949. In that winter, for the first time in many years, the great date-bearing Kuwait *bhum* fleet failed to appear in its usual strength in the waters along the southern shores of Arabia; only a portion of the usual quota appeared in Aden by the first of 1950. The dates that would ordinarily have come into Aden in Kuwait dhows came down unceremoniously under steam. What caused this abrupt change in the well-established status quo of the dhow trade? The same thing that has wrought so many other radical changes in the economy of the Middle East lately—oil!

Kuwait is actually a city-state with few industries except pearling, fishing, and shipbuilding; there are no farms, no date plantations, and only

[14] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 366.

361 a few scattered Bedouin tribes. The Kuwait Oil Company is now operating in high gear, and has apparently offered so many opportunities for natives that *nakhodas* (captains) have difficulty in getting men to sail their ships at the wages they can offer. Sailors never get any regular wages on a dhow, receiving a share of the earnings of the ship only after the voyage is over. Many sailors have apparently found that it is a comfortable feeling to receive a regular wage every week! It is too early yet to tell whether or not the change is permanent.

#39 There has also been a noticeable fall-off in date-bearing Arab dhows sailing to India, but apparently for a different reason. Vaidya[18] states that during the 1943-1944 season, presumably for the first time, sixty to seventy per cent of the Arab fleet that usually brought dates failed to appear because of Arab restrictions on the export of wet dates and because of the high prevailing prices of the dates. Thus, this case is not allied to the present situation prevailing in Kuwait, as during the 1943-1944 season dates presumably were not shipped to India by any other means.

However, even if Kuwait is unable to put its *bhums* to sea, the date crop in the future will still probably be carried out of the Persian Gulf in dhows as usual; it will take time to attain a balance again. Whether the port of Sur rises to the challenge or whether some Persian port takes the trade remains to be seen. The Suris from Oman are logical successors to Kuwait, for in times past they have been noted for taking cargoes at lower rates than the Kuwaiti or any other mariners could afford to, and they have a long maritime history.

It is interesting to note that oil activities in other areas in the Persian Gulf have drastically affected the marine activities of other coastal towns. Over ten years ago, the Saudi Arabian ports of Jubail, Qatif, and Darin used to send out over a hundred dhows yearly to join the Persian Gulf pearl fisheries. Now if they send out several dozen dhows it is news; the Arabs who used to dive for pearls now have steady jobs with the Arabian American Oil Company. The same has happened on Bahrein Island. The Bahrein *nakhodas* are no longer able to find a multitude of divers who will accept the wage the *nakhodas* are able to offer; thus the Bahrein pearl fleet is only a shadow of what it was a quarter of a century ago.

439 Most but not all Arab dhows load dates first; however, many Omani 226 dhows bring cargoes of dried fish and fish oil, for fishing is particularly good in the waters off Oman, and sharks and large tuna are caught in considerable amounts, both for home consumption and export. Sometimes, however, the Omanis may set out for Africa empty, or with only a partial

[18] K. B. Vaidya, op. cit., p. 207.

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs M1.2
Kuwait MEI



M 438 361 K 161 228 439 312 262

All the cities along this coast north of Ras el Kheima are diving communities, and some of them are quite large. Kuwait, the largest, has about fifty thousand inhabitants. Kuwait has good harbor facilities, and the government of the city has been notably efficient and strong-handed for many years. A pearl diver may as well live in one coast town as another, and so Kuwait has grown to be a large city. The drinking water for this entire city is brought in specially constructed sailing vessels from the mouth of the Arab River in Mesopotamia sixty miles away. The divers live on rice that is brought them from India, on wheat that comes from Persia, and on sheep from inland Persia and Arabia. The only local product is fish. The physical surroundings of all these towns are very similar to those of Kuwait. The landscape is an unbroken and monotonous expanse of sand on one side and sea on the other. The heat in summer is extreme and the air is practically always moist, so that for three or four months in the summer the climate is almost unbearable.

[K 132]

M 228 463

In the spring the diving community begins to hum with activity. The boats are cleaned up and repaired. New masts are put in and new rigging provided. As the time for diving approaches, supplies of food and water are taken on board. The divers collect from far and near. Most of the population are divers, and in addition many more come from a distance to dive for the season. There are men from every district in Arabia and from all over Mesopotamia; a few come even from the various provinces of Persia. The place is filled with festivities and good fellowship and hopes for a successful season.

M 228 501

The day for embarkation finally comes. The boats are fitted with enormous sails, and also with a full com-

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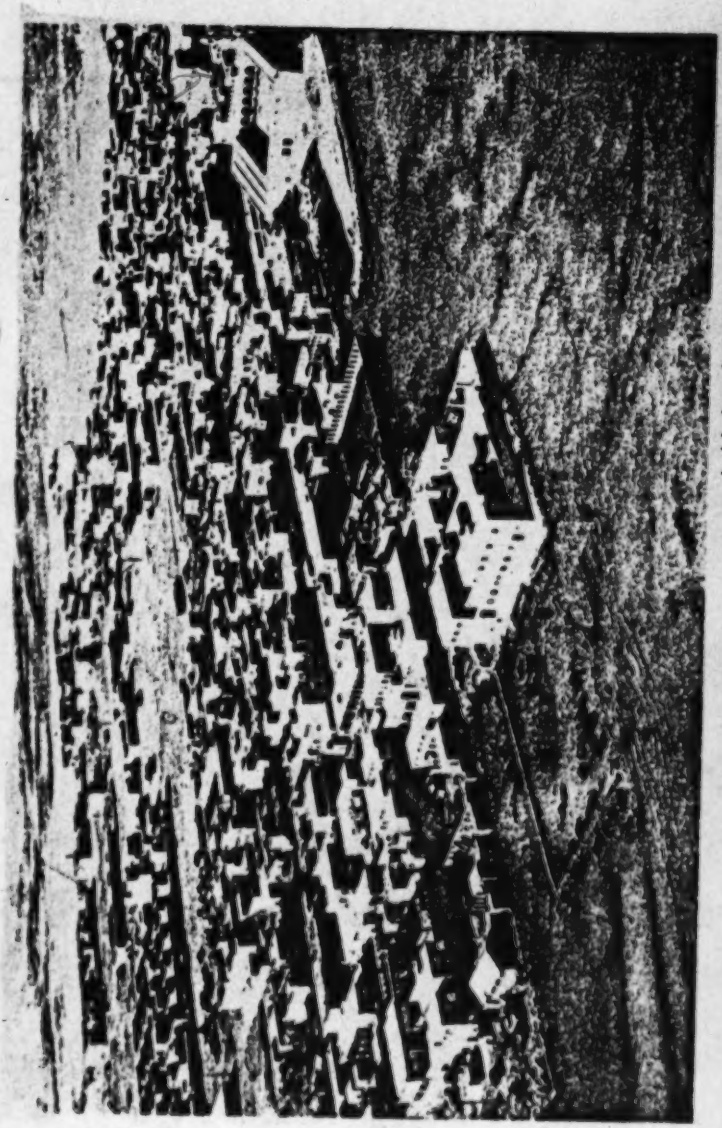
# VIEWS FROM THE PERSIAN GULF AREA



Aerial view of Al Khobar, seaport on the Persian Gulf and former marine terminal for Dhahran.

p. 28 (c)

# 396

396 SHIPBUILDING -- construction and repair of boats, ships, and underwater craft; manufacture of shipbuilding materials and equipment (e.g., marine motors, nautical gear); industrial specialization (e.g., shipyards); organization of labor and production; etc. See also:


| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Manufacture of cordage | 283 | Description of water craft | 501 |
| Woodworking | 322 | Water transport | 808 |
| Carpentry | 338 | Naval vessels | 716 |

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MK1

# SOME ASPECTS OF THE ARAB DHOW TRADE

*Alan Villiers*

K 506 439

AT THE end of 1939, there were 106 large ocean-going dhows on the registry of the Persian Gulf port of Kuwait. They averaged about 100 tons, the largest being 300 and the smallest about 75 tons, by European standards. Their average value, at that time, was perhaps 10,000 rupees, the approximate equivalent of $3,000. They made trading voyages with Iraqi dates, loaded in the Basra river, to the coasts of India and East Africa, generally making either two Indian, or one East African, voyage annually. The majority were in the trade to India, with an occasional diversion to East Africa. From India they were accustomed to bring back shipbuilding materials, coir for cordage, and Malabar teak; from East Africa they brought mangrove poles from either the delta of the Rufiji River, in Tanganyika, or from the port of Lamu, in Kenya Colony. These poles were used for building, and the dimensions of the rooms in most of the Kuwait houses depended upon the length of the mangrove poles brought from East Africa.

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In addition to these deep-sea dhows, there were also, at that time, between 100 and 150 pearlers, and some 50 or 60 smaller dhows in the local trade to the Basra river, many of them engaged in bringing fresh water (for Kuwait has no satisfactory supply of its own). New vessels were building at the rate of two or three a month, for deep-sea, and a similar number for coastwise trade.

K MA 396 439

The port of Kuwait was then, and is still, the principal dhow-

MA 114

† ALAN VILLIERS, deep-sea sailor and author, spent over twelve months in 1938–39 studying firsthand the Arab dhow trade of the Persian Gulf and the coasts of southern Arabia and East Africa. His experiences are described in his *Sons of Sinbad*, published in 1940; Mr. Villiers here presents further information on the social and economic aspects of the trade.

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1



building and trading port of the Persian Gulf, though offering little trade itself. Its only real rival in the deep-sea trade was the ancient port of Sur, near Ras al-Hadd, on the Gulf of Oman. Figures for the port of Sur were unobtainable, but there must have been at least 100 deep-sea dhows sailing from there, the majority to Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Zanzibar. Several ports on the Trucial Coast of Oman also sent their quota of deep-sea ships to Africa and India; and Muscat and Mutrah Bay, and the ports of Lingeh and Qishm, in Iran, contributed a few. But the flag of Iran was a rarity in both Indian and African ports, compared with the Arab.

In addition to the Persian Gulf and Omani ports, Mukalla in the Hadhramaut, Ma'alla by Aden, Hodeida, Mocha, and Luhaiya in the Yemen, and Qizan on the coast of Asir in the Red Sea, all build and maintain considerable fleets of dhows. These I have seen, personally; there are many ports I was unable to visit. It is probable that the dhow trade round the Arab coasts employs upwards of 2,000 vessels of one sort or another, in which at least thirty or forty thousand men gain some sort of livelihood.

For many years, steamers of the British India Company have been trading in the Persian Gulf. Kuwait is still well served by steamers from Karachi, and an occasional long-voyage vessel used to put in from New York and London, even before the oil resources began to be exploited in 1940. American, German, Italian, and British lines, none of them likely to overlook any cargoes, all traded to the Gulf. The African East Coast and the Indian coasts are even better served. How is it, then, that a dhow trade of such importance still survives? How is it organized, and how managed?

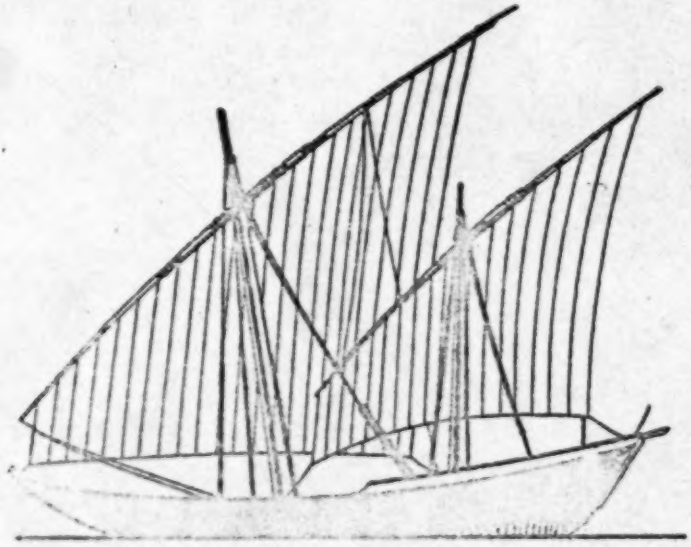
One reason — perhaps the chief — why the ancient trade with the monsoons down the Indian Ocean not only survives but flourishes is that the dhows warehouse the goods they carry as well as transport them, and it suits the merchants better to have 10,000 packages of new season's dates divided among a fleet of dhows, than in the hold of one steamer which will unload the lot in a day or two, and flood the market. Ten thousand packages provide cargoes for at least five large dhows; the dhow master does not care how long he takes to discharge his cargo, for his overheads are trifling, his crew works on shares and handles all cargo, and

2: Villiers T-S (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arab: MK2



of Dar es Salaam, loaded her with mangrove poles, and brought her back to Zanzibar again, where the *nakhoda* had ostensibly been trying to assemble passengers and extra cargo for the return to Arabia but in fact had been enjoying a new harem.

Mates are paid by shares, and are, in my opinion, an oppressed class. They carry their own ventures, engage in smuggling on a



*Baggala*

small scale — haberdashery, currency, and so forth — and generally keep the ship's books. They may become *nakhodas* of small *booms*, running to the Basra river; but it is unusual for a man from the more dignified deep-sea trades to descend to this. There is no social status about the *nakhoda* of a coastwise water dhow.

Ships are built by shipwrights who employ no naval architects. Both builders and riggers' lofts are unknown. The ships are put together entirely by eye and take the traditional form either of the double-ended *boom*, or the carved and embellished *baggala*, which obviously has a considerable ancestry from the Portuguese galleon.

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1



NA 396 501

galleon. *Baggalas*, being both costly to build and unwieldy in a seaway, are now unfashionable. A *boom* is both cheaper and much easier to build, and carries just as much. Her sharp stern makes her safer in a seaway, though it is no part of her builder's plan that her *nakhodas* will try her qualities in a storm. Their sailing, he hopes, will be confined to sunny seas and more or less favorable winds; therefore the clumsy lateen rig will do.

K MA 501 505

The lateen is awkward but cheap; it demands a big crew, but these are cheap, too, for they are the sailmakers and riggers as well as mariners, and their only cost is an agreed share in the ship's earnings. The lateen is a grand pulling sail, and the dhows sail handsomely in their own conditions. There is nothing clumsy about them, though their fish-oiled hulls smell abominably and their underwater bodies are preserved by a mixture of tallow and lime, rubbed on by hand and renewed quarterly. The sailors do this work, as well as handle all the cargoes, keep the passengers in order and extol the merits of their ship so that more passengers might sail with her, tow the ship with her own longboat and propel the smaller dhows by sweeps, in calms, and fight for her if need be. The Kuwait dhows today are never armed, though the Suri may be.

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## III

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A brief description of my personal experiences will serve to illustrate a typical East African voyage.[1] I sailed in a Kuwait dhow of the *boom* type, a vessel of 2,000 date-packages capacity — perhaps 150 tons — which had a crew of twenty-eight. She carried something between 120 and 180 passengers, although her hold was full of salt and rice, and her decks were already crowded with a large longboat, a small gig, and a dhow under construction for sale at Lamu.

K MA 439 505

I joined the vessel at Ma'alla, the native port of Aden. She had already been several months at sea, peddling a full cargo of dates from Fao (by the mouth of the Basra river) around the coast of the Hadhramaut, and to Berbera. When I joined her, she had been hauled out on the beach at Ma'alla and her bottom

K MA 113

[1] The voyage here summarized is described in detail in the author's *Sons of Sinbad* (New York, 1940).

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1



repayed, and already was loaded with her cargo of salt and rice in sacks, and some mysterious parcels on deck for the Sultan of Mukalla. All her crew had their sea chests filled with trade goods from the cheap *suq* in the Crater at Aden; her carpenter was at work on a 40-foot dhow for sale on the voyage; and she had shipped several Suri and Omani merchants, from Aden, bound on a general trading voyage on their own account, wherever the dhow might take them.

We sailed first to Mukalla and Shihr, where we embarked passengers (the fare was eight rupees regardless of destination, the passengers providing their own food and looking after themselves entirely) and some further cargo. This consisted mainly of a parcel of condemned dates which it was hoped to sell to the Somali (or failing that, to feed to the Swahili labor in the Rufiji Delta, when loading mangrove poles), some dried shark which smelled high even aboard the dhow, some cooking stones, and a considerable quantity of basketware.

With this lot aboard, and the *nakhoda* pessimistic and depressed at the small number of passengers, though his dhow appeared crowded, we sailed first to Haifun, a salt port on the northeastern coast of Italian Somaliland. There we anchored among a fleet of dhows, and did nothing at all for some time. Finally, some rice was sold, some haberdashery smuggled into boats which the local Somali brought alongside, and lot of fish caught and dried. Then we went on to Mogadishu, running down the coast with the northeast monsoon. At Haifun another Kuwait ship was caught smuggling and heavily fined; and all the Kuwaiti in the harbour contributed to pay the fine. At Mogadishu, it was hoped to land a hundred or so passengers, but the Italians would not permit them to disembark. Trade there was extremely difficult, and little could be done. Some of the merchants left, as far as I could gather, to try to collect debts owing to them from previous voyages. Some smuggling went on (I saw a lovely carpet change hands), some of our passengers melted away and their places were taken by others, equally undocumented.

After a week or ten days we passed on down the coast to Lamu. Here more passengers landed and there was a determined attempt to sell the new dhow which the carpenter had completed. She

K MA 501 439 435 was a lovely little vessel which could carry some fifteen tons. The price asked was 1,000 East African shillings, or about $240. At that price, there was no buyer; she finally changed hands at 700 shillings. Lamu was a mangrove-pole port, but I gathered the trade was rather too well regulated for our nakhoda's taste, and we bought nothing.

K MA 439 505 Next came Mombasa, a port with a large dhow trade. Some figures I saw in the Report of the General Manager on the Administration of the Railways and Harbours (Kenya and Uganda) showed that the dhow trade was increasing, rather than diminishing. The latest returns I say, for the year ended December 31, 1937, showed that 1,427 dhows had arrived at Mombasa, an increase of ten percent on the previous year. These 1,427 dhows were computed to register -- if they had been registered -- nearly 40,000 tons. Many were Swahili, from Lamu and Zanzibar, but a large proportion was Arab. There was a native harbor set aside for them, and here we sold salt, landing it in our own longboat.

K MA [579] We got rid of our surviving passengers, gave feasts to merchants and officials of the native harbor (these were a great feature of the voyage, and were always accompanied by much monotonous singing and dancing), gathered tidings from brother nakhodas from Kuwait and Sur about trade prospects further south, collected debts, and finally departed toward Zanzibar.

K MA 501 • 396 439 There were three Indian and one Iranian deep-sea dhows in the port at Mombasa. The Iranian was an enormous vessel of over 400 tons -- the largest dhow I saw anywhere. She was a boom and had been built at Kuwait, but the Kuwaiti sold her because they found such large vessels uneconomic, in bad times, for the mere reason of their two great capacity. They brought too much to sell, when the market was depressed, and they could not wait indenfinitely to dispose of their cargoes because their overhead was too high, despite the fact that everything possible was done to keep down building costs, even to the sending of Kuwaiti shipwrights to the Malabar coast to build big vessels there, rather than carry the timber to Kuwait.

K MA 439 Zanzibar, at that season of the year, was an even busier Arab port than Mombasa. In the first month of the northeast season, over a hundred ocean-going dhows had arrived at Zanzibar, most

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2



721 Parts of this coast are as dangerous for Europeans as for Arabs, and in
619 some instances more so for Europeans. Even as late as December 1949 on the supposedly peaceful coast of the Aden Protectorate an act of violence occurred against a British-owned yacht. I talked to the survivors several months later in Mukalla. They related how the 110-foot motor launch *Anne Loretta* with an Englishman, his wife, and one Arab crewman was cruising a little off shore when she touched a sand bar. The captain went ashore to lay out a stern anchor and was seized by the Arabs of the local Ardiab tribe on the coast; then his wife and the Arab went ashore to see what had happened and were likewise seized. Several British officials to whom I talked admitted that these two English people came very close to death in the hands of these unpacified coastal inhabitants. The British explanation was that the area was between the Eastern and Western Aden Protectorates where the tribes had not been pacified, and the yacht should never have landed there.

## IV

505 Every Arab dhow of ocean-going tonnage has a captain *(nakhoda)*, a mate, three quartermasters (or helmsmen), a boatswain, and perhaps a boatswain's mate in addition to the crew. The total complement on a 100-ton ship may be from twenty to twenty-five men, while on a 200-ton ship there will be from thirty-five to forty men. The small coasters of up to 50 tons have crews up to eight or ten; there are no officials on these
[291] small craft outside of the *nakhoda*. There is no formal dress on a dhow; often it is difficult to tell the *nakhoda* from the crew, as everyone usually wears simply a loin cloth or the long Arab gown and a head cloth.

A *nakhoda* is much more than the word 'captain' implies; he acts as navigator, pilot, shipwright, sailmaker, ropemaker, agent for buying and selling cargo, agent for freight, agent for recruiting passengers, cashier, bookkeeper, judge, and arbitrator. So completely does the *nakhoda* handle the ship and the ship's affairs that the mate has little to do when the *nakhoda* is aboard. Only when the *nakhoda* leaves the ship does the mate take over; that is the mate's only excuse for existence.

505 Many of the Kuwait ships on the run to Africa carry carpenters aboard
396 —not as ship's carpenters, but for the construction of small dhows for sale in African waters. Presumably they can sell them profitably in Africa at a price cheaper than the local boatbuilders! However, a small 10-ton dhow that was built aboard the Kuwait *bhum* on which Villiers sailed down the African coast, had to be left on the beach at Zanzibar in charge of a ship's agent, because the dhow could not be sold at the price de-

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2



manded.[44] Few dhows carry ship's carpenters; they hire a carpenter when they need one.

The actual duties of a dhow crew may often begin weeks or months before the voyage starts. If the dhow is new, the first duties of the crew are to rig the ship and make the sails (see Plate 20—top). A boatbuilder furnishes only the hull with masts and yards; fitting out the ship is considered part of the work preliminary to making the voyage, and the sailors do not actually receive money for this preliminary work, as they are paid only when the voyage is over. If they actually need it, the *nakhoda* will give the sailors cash advances; these advances are later deducted from the sailor's share of the vessel's earnings at the end of the voyage. Thus the *nakhoda* fits out his ship at no cost to himself so far as labor goes—the crew actually furnishes it for nothing! Besides this the crew does all the stevedoring on any cargo the dhow may carry, also transporting the cargo in the longboat when required (see Plate 19—bottom).

Arab dhows keep no schedule and know little routine. At sea everyone, including the *nakhoda*, usually loses track of time. Friday, the Moslem day of rest, is not observed at sea, so the sailors work the month around and days come to mean nothing; it is easier not even to try to keep track of them. The only track of time the Arabs keep is the occurrence of Ramadhan, the month when the Moslems fast during the daylight hours. The Arabs know whether Ramadhan is before them or whether it has passed; if it is ahead of them, they keep a very rough idea of how far off it is.

When there is no work, the crew sleeps in a shady spot, if one is available—on the cargo or a pad. All hands turn out day and night for any work. It is not uncommon to see a dhow-load of sleeping sailors pass in broad daylight, but they can be on their feet in a second.

Watches are informal and virtually nonexistent on a dhow. Usually the *nakhoda* keeps watch during the day and the mate or a quartermaster or a boatswain keeps watch during the night. It usually turns out that the helmsman keeps watch, as he is the only man who has to keep awake! The carpenter on a Kuwait ship stands no watches and has few other duties outside of his boatbuilding.

There is a general working period of several hours for all hands every day, usually during the morning. The most essential duty is bailing; the foul bilge water is brought up from a small bailing-well in buckets, and is either dumped into a bailing-trough to flow overboard or dumped overboard via a fireman's bucket brigade. The decks are never washed down, as the water would drain below, through the leaky decks, rather than

[44] A. Villiers, 55, p. 268.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

PLATE 20

396

The crew that is to sail a new dhow must rig the ship and make the sails first. The photograph shows a set of sails being made at Aden

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Rope making is one of the odd jobs that crew members perform. Here an old sailor makes some rope using his toes as well as his hands

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